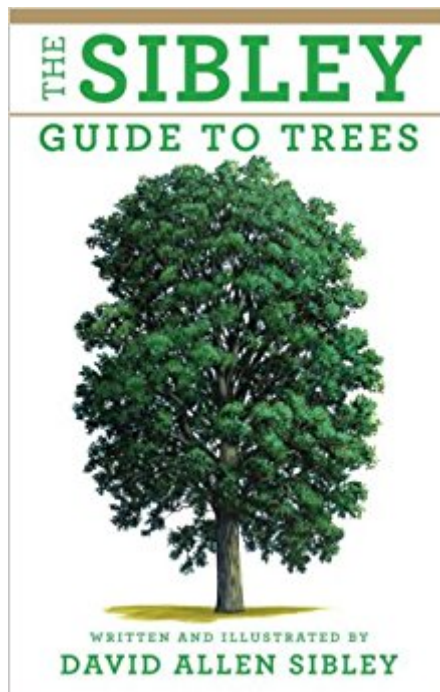


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The Sibley Guide To Trees



Synopsis

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Book Information

Flexibound: 426 pages

Publisher: Knopf; First Edition edition (September 15, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 037541519X

ISBN-13: 978-0375415197

Product Dimensions: 6.3 x 1.1 x 9.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 115 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #17,303 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #6 in [Books > Science & Math > Agricultural Sciences > Forestry](#) #7 in [Books > Science & Math > Nature & Ecology > Forests & Rainforests](#) #12 in [Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Plants > Trees](#)

Customer Reviews

Book Description The man who revolutionized the field guide to birds now brings his formidable skills of identification and illustration to the more than six hundred tree species of North America. Similar in size and format to *The Sibley Guide to Birds*, the layout for this guide is another triumph of logic and concision. Species are arranged taxonomically, not by features such as leaf shape (as in most other guides), which will enable the user to browse the images to find a match for an observed tree in the same way a birder uses the bird guide. And all pages will follow the same format, allowing the user to pinpoint particular information with ease. David Sibley's meticulous, exquisitely detailed paintings illustrate the cycles of annual and lifetime development, and reveal even the very subtle similarities and distinctions between like elements of different species: bark, leaves, needles, cones, flowers, fruit, twigs, and silhouettes. More than four hundred maps show the complete range, both natural and cultivated, for nearly all the species. Issues of conservation, preservation, and environmental health are addressed in authoritative essays. As innovative, comprehensive, and indispensable as *The Sibley Guide to Birds*, this new book will set the standard of excellence in field guides to trees.

A Q&A with David Allen Sibley

Question: When did your interest in trees begin?

David Allen Sibley: It has always been there. I don't think there is anything unusual about that--kids like to climb trees, imagine living in a big hollow tree, etc. When I was about 8 years old, I lived near Muir Woods so seeing the Redwoods, and smelling what I now

know are California Laurel trees made a big impression on me. And I think an interest in trees follows naturally from an interest in birds--looking at birds means you are looking at a lot of trees, and when you do you start to notice different things about their twigs and leaves and bark. Q: How long have you been working on this book and what kind of research did it entail? How long did each illustration in this book take you? DAS: Well, I've been studying trees for as long as I've been bird watching. Whenever I'm out in the field observing birds I'm also observing habitat. I'm noticing everything. It's impossible for a naturalist to study just one thing, since they are all connected. But the actual work on the book began 7 years ago, soon after the bird guide was completed. I spent the first few years traveling to study and photograph different species, reading about trees, working out my painting technique for these images, and planning the book page-by-page. I'm lucky to live near Boston, where the Arnold Arboretum and Mount Auburn Cemetery offer the chance to study hundreds of species of trees right here. It's really been the last four years that I've spent most of my time in the studio painting and writing. Just like the bird guide, each individual image would take an average of about an hour to complete, from sketch to finished painting. Q: Were there major differences in writing this book vs. the Guide to Birds? DAS: The obvious difference is that trees are much easier to find. When I needed to study a particular species of tree I could just walk right up to it and spend as much time investigating it as I needed. Birds are more elusive. I had to spend years in the field in order to build up enough observation time to draw them well. Another key difference is that birds recognize each other by sight, the same way we do, and the evolution of their appearance has been guided and sharply limited by how they look to other birds. Trees can't see, they communicate through pollen and some chemical signals, so one tree doesn't "care" what another's leaves or bark look like. Their appearance has evolved for purely functional reasons. The exception is some flowers and fruit, which have evolved certain visual cues to attract the animals that pollinate flowers or disperse seeds. Q: What would you say to someone who is a beginner at tree identification? What are the key identifying features in a tree? DAS: The first thing I suggest is to spend some time with the guide. Try to become familiar with the characteristics of certain trees. Then go through the book and mark all the species that occur in your area. This will help you become familiar with the range of species that could be present so when you see an odd leaf shape, fruit, flower, bark pattern, etc.--even if you can't remember the name--you can remember seeing it in the guide. Since trees are so easy to approach, you can simply take a photo of the key parts of any tree, or pick up a leaf or other part that has fallen on the ground, and identify it at your leisure. The key identifiers will always be the shape, color and size of leaves; the color

and shape of twigs; the color and texture of bark; and the tree's overall size and shape as well as habitat, any fruit or flowers, and the timing of seasonal changes. For example, in late May in the northeast, if you see a pale-barked tree with small silvery leaves just emerging (while other trees have well-developed green leaves) you can be virtually certain that is a Bigtooth Aspen. A multi-trunked, spreading tree in wetter soils, with clusters of straw-colored fruit hanging from the twigs all winter, is almost certainly a female Boxelder.

Q: How many species of trees do we have in the U.S. and Canada? DAS: There are about 700 species of trees native to North America (depending on how you define a tree). Hundreds more species are cultivated here, and quite a few of those have escaped and are growing in the wild. In this book I left out a lot of species that are "shrubs sometimes tree-like", and species found only in southern Florida, in favor of including commonly cultivated trees that people will see more frequently.

Q: Why did you decide to structure your guide taxonomically? DAS: I think one of the keys to learning birds, or trees, or any other living thing, is to learn the taxonomy--the families and genera--and to understand which species are closely-related and which are not. My goal in studying trees is to gain a deeper understanding of them, and part of that is to learn the fundamental things that all maples, or all alders, etc. have in common. Presenting the species in the guide grouped with their closest relatives, helps readers begin to recognize those fundamental similarities, and then they'll be able to look at a tree and say "that just looks like a maple" in the same way that birders recognize a wren or a thrush.

Q: You have said that in researching this book you noticed that trees demonstrate, much more so than birds, the impact that humans have had on the landscape. How so? DAS: Bird populations in North America have certainly changed dramatically since the 1500s, but it's still possible to see almost all the same species, and in pretty much the same places and times, as the early European explorers saw them. But the tree landscape we see today is dramatically different from what our ancestors saw 500 years ago. Here in Massachusetts, there are only small patches of old-growth forest that have never been cut. Most have been cut multiple times during the last few centuries, and what we call "mature" forest today are trees mostly under 100 years old, so they're still pretty young with time to mature. Add to that the introduced diseases that have all but eliminated species like American Chestnut, and the addition of non-native species like Norway Maple and Northern Catalpa (it's said that 50% of the woody plants growing now in the state of Massachusetts are non-native) and you have a very different landscape. I imagine that if Audubon or Thoreau were to come back today, they would see a lot of familiar birds, but the changes in the forests would shock them.

Q: Which tree populations are in the most danger of extinction and what

can be done about it? DAS: Several species of trees are seriously threatened by disease, in the same way that the American Chestnut was wiped out by the Chestnut Blight in the early 1900s. Whitebark Pine, Butternut, Red Bay, and some oaks in California are all experiencing severe declines. Efforts are underway to contain these diseases, to prevent new pests from entering this continent, and to find and propagate resistant trees. In many cases the disease need not be fatal, but with many of our trees stressed by acid rain and/or large scale climatic changes like drought, they are more susceptible. One of the best things we can do to ensure the survival of healthy forests is to act quickly to reduce atmospheric pollution since that has far-reaching effects among trees. More directly, we should reduce our use of paper, as old-growth forests in Canada and elsewhere are still being cut down and ground up as pulp for paper.

Q: Where is the biggest tree in North America? The oldest? DAS: One of the fun hobbies among tree enthusiasts is searching for "champion" trees--the biggest tree of each species. American Forests maintains a national registry of "Big Trees" and many states keep their own list. The tallest tree ever measured was a Coast Redwood in California at 377 feet tall. The largest single tree by volume was another Coast Redwood with a trunk measuring over 88,000 cubic feet of wood and estimated to weigh over 3300 tons! The oldest tree is a Bristlecone Pine in Nevada known to be nearly 5000 years old. But these records of age and volume are both challenged by the Quaking Aspen, which often grows multiple trunks from a single large root system, and can be considered a single organism. One such plant in Utah covers over 100 acres with 47,000 trunks, and contains an estimated 6000 tons of wood, making it the largest single organism known. Estimates of its age range from 80,000 years up to one million years. The average age of any individual trunk is about 130 years, new trunks are constantly being produced by the root system.

Q: Do you have a favorite tree? DAS: That's like asking me to pick a favorite bird! I have a lot of favorites. I like the clean bark and majestic appearance of the Sycamores, the quirkiness of the Sassafras, the clean lines of the crown of the Noble Fir, the incredible cones of Coulter Pine. I could go on and on!

Q: We are certainly seeing a fierce focus on the environment in every area of public and private life--from politics to business to the cars we drive and the light bulbs we buy. Where do trees fit into our environmental future? How important are they? DAS: It could be argued that trees play a bigger role in our lives than any other living things. We use them for construction, paper and cardboard; for food; for heat in our homes and for cooking; for shade and ornament around our houses and offices; and for specialty items like musical instruments and sports equipment, where no other material will do. Chances are that you are surrounded by wood as you read this. In natural ecosystems trees are important on their own. Their leaves and branches provide food and shelter to countless species of

animals. Even more critical is the habitat that trees create. The air under a forest canopy can be 15 degrees cooler, and much more humid, than air over an open field. This microclimate and the leaf litter on the forest floor create an entire secondary ecosystem of other plants and animals which can only exist with a healthy forest canopy. Trees filter pollutants from the air, turn carbon dioxide into oxygen, and create rich soil. On top of all that, trees are pleasing and relaxing to be around. (Photo © Erinn Hartman) A Look Inside The Sibley Guide to Trees (Click on Images to Enlarge)

“The Sibley Guide to Trees is so well done that even the most serious birders may find themselves identifying and enjoying trees in their own right . . . All aspects of the trees are shown: leaves (from above and below), buds, flowers, fruits, twigs, and bark. For most species, the autumn leaves are illustrated and, when appropriate, new growth as well . . . The excellent range maps are large and dependable . . . The information is well ordered [and] the guide includes the very latest research . . . The Sibley Guide to Trees will occupy a treasured space right next to The Sibley Guide to Birds . . . It is as monumental and as purely pleasurable as the bird guide, and a masterful and fitting companion.”

•Clay and Pat Sutton, *Birding* magazine

“A beautiful, masterful, and much-needed work that will henceforth be our guide to the North American trees.”

œEdward O. Wilson

“A wonderful companion volume to David Sibley’s superb bird books, with the same beautifully precise species illustrations and concise, clear descriptions and range maps

œaltogether an invaluable contribution to our nature literature.”

œPeter Matthiessen, author of *Shadow Country*

“Unlike birds the subject of David Sibley’s previous guide

œtrees of the same species can be different colors at different times of year, different sizes in different places, and even different shapes and sizes in the same place. I thought, therefore, that trees were so replete with variables that a field guide would be impossible. I hadn’t counted on Sibley’s

œgenius with words and paint to turn the impossible into this brilliant, eminently useful, reality.”

œRichard Ellis, author of *Tuna: A Love Story*

“I am delighted that the very talented David Sibley has

œbranched out

œto include trees. His illustrations are ideal, and the fact that he chooses to give more examples and variations than other guides will make this a very useful handbook.”

œRobert Bateman, author of *Birds*

“I think that I shall never see another guide that makes it so easy to identify a tree . . . David Allen Sibley, the preeminent bird-guide author and illustrator, has written a book that is monumental in scope but user-friendly in practical use. Simply put, this is the single most comprehensive guide to North American trees . . . This is an important, new contribution that is certain to help us better

understand our natural world. • Larry Cox, Tucson Citizen

“David Allen Sibley has done it again. Nine years after the publication of his acclaimed *The Sibley Guide to Birds*, the book that changed the way we look at our field guides, he’s turned his attention to the second most beloved member of the birder’s world—the tree. In more than 4,000 exquisite paintings, Sibley reveals what to look for to identify 668 native and commonly cultivated trees . . . and to do so the same way you identify birds: from a distance.

• Matt Mendenhall, *Birder’s World*

“Sibley’s book brings the advantages of painting to tree identification, keeping plant parts in scale when necessary, showing variations in the shapes of everything from leaves to acorns, and making finely nuanced color choices that really help you parse similar species and outright hybrids . . . It’s obviously made for field use. The durable, flexible cover has end flaps to bookmark whatever you happen to be studying, and the extra size gives you pictures you can see easily . . . This book will become a classic.

• Jim McCausland, *Sunset Magazine*

“David Allen Sibley is the artist and author responsible for several excellent bird books (mine are well thumbed), and his tree guide holds its own against the Audubon series. His paintings manage the neat trick of being both evocative and accurate; the telling details are clearly articulated.

• Dominique Browning, *The New York Times Book Review*

“Sibley’s inclusiveness for most tree families is remarkable for a one-volume work . . . With a few exceptions . . . the user of this guide can expect to find any native tree found in North America north of Mexico.

• Alan Pistorius, *Northern Woodlands magazine*

“[A] blockbuster . . . The book is arranged in taxonomic order. Pines, firs and spruces are at the front of the book with the flowering and nut-bearing trees following. This ordering puts all the pines together, the oaks in one group, the ashes together and so forth. I favor that arrangement in field guides because it demonstrates the natural relationship between families of trees, thus teaching a little botany as well as providing identifications.

• Paul G. Wiegman, *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*

“Rich with identification aids (including leaves, nuts, flowers, bark, shape, and range maps), Sibley’s guide will make a useful and entertaining companion . . .

• Jay Strafford, *Richmond Times-Dispatch*

“Thousands of paintings featuring well chosen details will help you identify trees even in winter . . . With native trees the most vulnerable and important plants endangered by climate change, we need to sharpen our awareness of wild trees of the woodlands which provide oxygen, food, shelter and erosion control for our ecosystem and which are very different from the cloned exotic trees we plant in our backyard gardens as pampered pets.

• Carol Stocker, *The Boston Globe* (#1 on her list of the year’s 10

best garden books)“The Sibley Guide to Trees, a wealth of knowledge on tree identification, is crafted in Sibley’s aesthetic and easy-to-understand style . . . Fantastic . . . A great new book.”

•Katrina Marland, American Forests magazine

“Is The Sibley Guide to Trees as awesome as The Sibley Guide to Birds? I’d have to say yes. [It] is truly a tree tour de force, a worthy companion to the author’s banner bird guide. One first notices how gorgeous this volume is; the graphic design is subtle but sharp . . . Likely the best amateur tree ID guide on the market. Yet the significance of this work far exceeds its utility. This Sibley Guide serves as a bridge from that other Sibley Guide to the rest of the natural universe . . . The Sibley Guide to Trees is an essential reference text for anyone and everyone who has ever wondered about the identity of a tree. I rank this book right up there with my beloved Sibley Guide to Birds as mandatory editions in any home library.”

•Mike Bergin, 10000birds.com

“Sibley’s guide deserves a place in all libraries, public or private . . . The Sibley Guide to Tree is the closest thing we’ve got to a registry of trees in North America.”

•Chris Watson, Santa Cruz Sentinel

“Invaluable”

•The Hartford Courant

“Is David Allen Sibley’s new work as useful, reliable and interesting as his book on birds? For me, a nonbotanist who has wandered through forests in much of the country, it is. This guidebook is filled with clear, concise descriptions and wonderful drawings of species ranging from sumac to saguaro.”

•John R. Alden, The Plain Dealer

“A treasure trove of knowledge on North American trees. Each page is a wealth of information . . . The beautifully illustrated pages are in color and full detail, down to giving the dimensions and shapes of the acorns from each variety of oak.”

•Sandy Mahaffey, The Free Lance-Star (Fredericksburg, VA)

“A masterful contribution to the genre . . . With each entry, there’s a short written description of the tree and its main characteristics, along with drawings of the leaves, buds, bark, flowers, fruits and seeds •and in many cases, the tree structure or form. And wow, when you flip through the pine section, you can easily see the difference in the needles and cones. Best of all, Sibley includes a map with each entry showing the natural range of the tree throughout the US and Canada . . . It’s small enough to take with you outside when you want to know whether you’re looking at a white, a black, or a red oak. My copy is likely going to . . . be completely dog-eared within a year or two.”

•Jane Berger, Garden Design Online

This book will help you figure it out. Purchased on recommendation from a Dendrologist (Tree scientist) for someone who asked for a "Really good" Tree identification book, it does not disappoint.

As a beginner learning to identify trees for the first time, this book is as user-friendly as they come. Easily read through or picked up to flip through. Sibley has taken the same simple approach to Tree ID as he did in his field guide to birds and it works.

This book gives lots of information about trees. I used it for a Dendrology class and found it to be my bible. Very educational! Great condition. Light weight, easy for use in the field.

What can I say? I'm a Sibley fan. The detail, both illustrated and written are beyond reproach, and I've had them all autographed (so what?). Are they they the be all end all? No. Do I own several other author's books on various subject matter? Many. Books like this are a personal choice and you should check many of them out to see what works for you, especially if you plan on owning only one book on a subject. If you don't use it then what's the point of owning it? For example, I use Sibley, Peterson, Stokes, Newcome and others depending on what I'm looking for. If you have the chance, go out with a group and ask to see what they are using and ask why. Then make up your own mind. Do all these types of books do what they're intended for? More or less. A case in point is the Audubon series. I think they are terrible because all they show you is one picture, as if an oak is an oak is an oak. The better ones will have drawings pointing out unique and identifiable features. You really need to know individual characteristics if you want to be able to identify something in the field. What if it's winter, so there are no leaves on the tree you're trying to identify, and your book shows a picture of a full grown tree in summer? SOL. Now you need to know shape, habitat, bark, twig, fruit, etc. This book does it all. Add a dichotomous key to your list as well. Spring is bud time, so try to identify your local trees just by that aspect. Hope that helps and good luck!

This is a must-have guidebook for anyone who has an interest in trees! It is so well organized and detailed throughout the pages.

David Allen Sibley is the Roger Tory Peterson of our time. I have become familiar with Mr. Sibley through his bird illustrations and books. He is quite simply the best illustrator of wild life and wild growth alive today in America. His intimate familiarity with the subjects he illustrates is evident in the most cursory review of his books. For the amateur interested in trees and birds, I strongly recommend his books as a guide to identification. His bird book never leaves my car and his Guide to Trees is regularly used in my library. His Hawks in Flight, written and illustrated in collaboration

with Pete Dunne, is an American classic.

This book has a section for each family where it clearly details the hallmarks of each family and, in some cases, explains what separates that family from similar families--something missing from most field guides!

excellent author of field guides

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